

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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SECRETARY ANDRUS DIRECTS SPEEDY IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW ALASKA LANDS LAW

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said today he has directed several major steps toward speedy implementation of the Alaska Lands legislation signed into law by President Carter December 2. The steps include immediate upgrading of the Alaska offices of three Interior agencies to the full status of regional offices.

"This will give Alaska managers of the National Park Service, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service direct access to their own top executives in Washington, D. C., and through them to top policy-makers at the Secretarial level," Andrus said.

In a related move, the Secretary said he would recommend to the President that additional funds to implement the new law be included in his 1981 supplemental and 1982 fiscal year budgets, reflecting the high priority involved.

"Many of you will be dramatically increasing your Alaska efforts," he wrote in a memorandum to his Assistant Secretaries. "In these days of budget austerity, innovative ways must be developed to initiate coordinated joint efforts. You should make every effort to accomplish such cooperation to achieve more effective management and save money."

Noting that the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act specifies more than 100 required tasks, such as regulations, reports and studies, Andrus said a lead or coordinating agency has been designated for each task. Interior "will also move to speed final settlement of Alaska Native claims and to meet its obligations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Alaska Statehood Act," he said.

The new law creates an Alaska Land Use Council, to be made up of representatives from Interior, and other Federal agencies, the State of Alaska, and the 12 regional Native corporations, to study and recommend actions relating to management and administration of Federal and State lands.

(more)

Andrus strongly endorsed the new entity, and the Act's provision for a Federal Coordination Committee, and directed his executives to provide the necessary assistance to set up both as quickly as possible.

"There must be steady coordination and communication to make this complex and vitally important new legislation work properly," he said, adding:

"Now, the challenge before the Department is careful implementation of the legislation. The promises will become a reality if we are sensitive to the way the new areas are administered, the results of our studies mandated in the legislation, and the need for cooperation with our land-owning neighbors in Alaska."

Regional offices of Interior Department agencies normally administer activities in as many as eight States, the Secretary observed, but Alaska is so large and the actions mandated by the new law will be so intense that Alaska properly must be treated as a region in its own right.

The new legislation, almost nine years in the making, designates some 104 million Federally owned acres in Alaska for permanent protection, chiefly as national parks and park preserves, national wildlife refuges, and national wild and scenic rivers. It directs quick action to fulfill the State of Alaska's entitlement to about 103 million acres and to expedite Native selection of an additional 44 million acres. The size and scope of the measure, and its effort to preserve entire ecosystems, have led observers to describe it as one of the landmark conservation laws in American history.

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